CONSUMING AUTHENTIC NEIGHBOURHOOD: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF EXPERIENCING A NEIGHBOURHOOD'S NEW BEGINNINGS AND ORIGINS WITHIN ITS SERVICESCAPES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. This chapter examines individual and collective quests for authenticity, as experienced through consumption activities within an urban neighbourhood. It investigates the interplay between consumption experiences as authenticating acts and authoritative performances (Arnould and Price 2000), and considers the implications with regard to Zukin's (2010) theories on urban authenticity, and how it may be experienced as new beginnings and origins.

Methodology. The chapter is based on autoethnographic research that explores how interaction and identity definition within servicescapes can work to construct place-based community.

Findings. It describes how a servicescape of new beginnings offered opportunities for individual authentication that also enabled personal identification with a specific cultural group. This authentication drew on the cultural capital embedded in such locations, including their association with gentrification. This is contrast with the collective identification offered by a servicescape operating as a place of exposure. This site of origins displayed the social practices of a different demographic, which worked to highlight a relational link between the authentication practices of the broader neighbourhood. These sites also worked cumulatively, to highlight the inauthenticities within my identification practices and offer opportunities for redress. Through this interplay it was possible to establish an authentic sense of

neighbourhood that drew on its new beginnings and its origins, and was both individual and collective.

Originality. Through the combination of urban and consumption-based perspectives of authenticity, and an autoethnographic methodology, this chapter offers a different insight into the ways identification with, and attachment to, a neighbourhood can develop through consumption experiences.

KEYWORDS

Authenticity; autoethnography; community; consumption experience; neighbourhood; servicescapes.

INTRODUCTION

The urban environment is a key site of identity-definition for many individuals in contemporary society, and consequently consumption experiences and the urban places in which they occur are a fundamental aspect of contemporary urban living. Because of this, experiencing the urban environment is increasingly associated with consuming it, in that the identity of an urban area becomes an additional value that can be extracted through a consumption experience. Conversely then the urban experience is also created through its consumption, such that areas can take on identities associated with the consumption experiences available within them. For individual consumers this implies that urban identities can become yet another consumable, able to be adopted through everyday and lifestyle consumption experiences within urban servicescapes.

This chapter explores this interplay between consumption and the urban environment within the context of neighbourhood-based community. It shows the way that personal processes of authentication may intersect with perceptions of urban authenticity, and in particular how those processes may relate to experiences of community. To do so it adopts Arnould and Price's (2000) conceptualisation of authenticating acts and authoritative performances, and considers the implications with regard to Zukin's (2010) recent theories on the ways that authenticity may be experienced within the urban environment, as new beginnings and origins. It draws on research that investigated the ways that individuals use the opportunities for

interaction and identity definition offered by servicescapes for the purposes of constructing and reinforcing place-based community.

This chapter specifically focuses on the autoethnographic component of that project to explore how two neighbourhood servicescapes worked as sites of my individual and collective authentication. It describes how these servicescapes worked to connect this authentication to the neighbourhood's new beginnings and origins, by drawing on the cultural capital of the new urban middle class, and the traditional socialising practices of a older neighbourhood-based demographic. It then also considers the ways that these sites worked cumulatively, to highlight the inauthenticities within my identification practices, which subsequently worked to authenticate a broader connection to the neighbourhood. Firstly, however a brief review of the literature of authentication is provided, with a focus on the work of Zukin (2010) regard to the urban environment, and Arnould and Price (2000), in relation to consumer identity projects.

AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity is associated with that which is genuine, real, true or unique. The possibility of experiencing or expressing an authentic identity thus relies on the belief in a 'true' inner core that exists apart from all outside influence (Taylor, 1991; Trilling, 1972). However, such claims of purity and separation are difficult to make in contemporary society, because the tools through which we seek to experience and express authenticity are provided by society (Taylor, 1991). These tools include the products and experiences provided by consumer culture.

Furthermore, authenticity is not only embedded within the social realm, but it is also subjective. This is because assessments of the authenticity of objects or experiences are based on assumptions of perceived essence, rather than actual physical properties (Beverland and Farrelly 2010).Thus the identity-defining outcome is not reliant on whether the experience really is authentic, but instead on whether the individual interprets it as being so (Arnould and Price, 2000; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Cohen, 1988). It is this subjective assessment that allows individuals to overlook or downplay the inauthentic elements in many consumption experiences; such as that which exists in the staged authenticity of museums, the contrived nature

of reality television programs, and the fleeting connections of consumer communities (e.g., Goulding, 2000; Kozinets, 2002; Rose and Wood, 2005). That is, individuals willingly overlook the inauthentic aspects of an experience, in order to realise the identity benefits that authenticity is deemed to offer.

This chapter is specifically interested in how these quests for authenticity may play out in, and through, the urban environment. For many people cities form the main physical and social context for their authentication practices. However they are also environments that are themselves subject to assessments of authenticity. In particular, the positioning of the city as an experience to be consumed has implications for the manner in which authenticity can be used as a form of cultural power. This concern underlies Zukin's (2010) recent exploration of urban authenticity, which is summarised in the following section.

Experiencing Authenticity in the Urban Environment

The ways that quests for authenticity may be experienced within, and shape the urban environment, is the focus of Zukin's most recent book, *Naked City: The death and life of authentic urban places* (2010). In this work she considers how understandings of authenticity as creativity or uniqueness, and as tradition or myth, may apply when authenticity is sought through the consumption of urban places and cultures. Drawing on the work of Said (1985), Zukin terms these two expressions of authenticity in the urban context as *new beginnings*, and *origins*. Urban authenticity experienced as *new beginnings* refers to the distinct features that each cultural group bring to the built and social environment; those that express their particular cultural distinctiveness or moment in time. Authenticity experienced as *origins* refers to features of city that seem to have always existed; its historical and mythical roots. This is authenticity that is acquired through age or patina. Whilst Zukin acknowledges that a city's constantly shifting identity draws on its origins and new beginnings, her concern is that claims of recognising authenticity can be used as a form of moral superiority, with implications for the look and use of urban places.

In particular, when these claims of authenticity become claims of power, they can work to privilege the cultural capital of certain groups, and disadvantage others. As Zukin suggests, this process is most evident in gentrifying areas. Here the social and cultural preferences that manifest as the new beginnings of the urban middle class

are often presented as the model of an authentic urban experience, whilst the historical features of the built environment become an aestheticised version of the area's origins. This aestheticisation implies distancing, which can depersonalise a neighbourhood's origins, such that representations of traditional roots through historical buildings are valued over representation through demographic diversity. This aestheticisation can also separate those making claims of authenticity from any commodifying or displacing consequences, because origins is still able to be experienced through the built form. Zukin's conclusion is that without state intervention, through rent controls, land zoning, and financial incentives for small business, this aestheticisation of origins will continue with significant implications for urban diversity, and for urban authenticity.

This chapter applies Zukin's categorisations on a more individual level. It investigates the identity-defining behaviours of the author as I attempted to use consumption experiences as a means of connecting to a neighbourhood-based community. Zukin does not explicitly talk about community in her book. However her concerns regarding the loss of diversity in neighbourhoods, as new residents leverage their cultural capital to create new beginnings appears to hinge on an implied shift from collective identifications based on shared place of residence, to those based on shared lifestyle preferences. In this chapter I am interested in the ways that my authentication practices may draw on new beginnings and origins, and if these experiences reflect Zukin's concerns regarding the use of cultural capital. Because this research is also interested in place-based community, the implications of Zukin's categorisations for the ways an individual may experience community are also a focus of this chapter. To do so, this chapter applies Arnould and Price's (2000) theorisation of the ways authenticity manifests through both individual and collective processes. Their definitions of authenticating acts and authoritative performances are outlined in the following section.

Experiencing Authenticity in Individual and Collective Ways

The concepts of authenticity as new beginnings and origins were formulated by Zukin with specific reference to the contemporary urban environment. More broadly however Arnould and Price (2000) suggest that the quest for an authentic self in contemporary society occurs in two ways; as authenticating acts and as authoritative

performances. These are individual and collective processes of authentication that utilise the tools of consumer culture as a means of challenging the destabilising processes of postmodernity. This chapter applies these categorisations as a means of considering how authentication practices that draw on the new beginnings and origins of an urban neighbourhood may work in individual and collective ways.

Authenticating acts are self-referential behaviours that construct or reinforce an individual's sense of self. Such authentication is often associated with experiences that induce flow, peak experience, or peak performance, such as white-water rafting or sky-diving (e.g., Arnould and Price, 1993; Celsi et al., 1993). However Arnould and Price (2000) also suggest that authentication may result from an accumulation of experiences with more ordinary products, such as possessions that over time and through use, become intertwined with personal histories (see also Belk, 1988). In the same manner, Denzin (1992) argues that these epiphanic experiences need not only occur from a major upheaval. They can also be the result of an illuminative moment that highlights underlying existential structures; from a reflective moment where the consequences of change are realised; or from an accumulation of experiences which eventually force change. This suggests that ordinary experiences can also constitute that basis for authentication, provided they have not become routinised, typified or fragmented to the extent they are unable to be disrupted by epiphanic events or synthesised into a broader life narrative (Arnould and Price 2000).

This broader perspective of personal authentication is in line with that of Caru and Cova (2003, 2007) who argue for a more 'humble' view of the consumption experience that recognises the import of our everyday consumption activities in identity definition. It is also one that is particularly appropriate with regard to the urban environment, because whilst the city clearly offers opportunities for extraordinary experiences, our ordinary consumption activities also significantly shape our urban experiences, and thus our assessments of its authenticity.

Whilst authenticating acts are concerned with individual identity definition, authoritative performances are collective displays, such as festivals and rituals, which are aimed at constructing or reinforcing shared identity and traditions. These performances rely on 'experiences-in-common', based around stylised invocations of tradition or ritual. In this respect authoritative performances can be associated with the postmodern tribal aesthetic of 'feeling emotions together' (Cova, 1997; Maffesoli, 1996). Neighbourhood festivals and street parades are clear examples of these

collective performances (e.g., Sherry et al., 2007). However the less extraordinary, but still staged authenticity of neighbourhood farmers markets also provide opportunities for collective experiences that reinforce shared identity (e.g., McGrath et al., 1993; Zukin, 2010).

As with authenticating acts, this chapter suggests these acts of collective authentication can also be more ordinary. This possibility is illustrated through Anderson's (2006) concept of imagined community. This theory proposes that experiences of community are shaped by cognitive and symbolic structures that are not necessarily underpinned by lived social relations. That is, moments of collective identification can also be inspired by more everyday, but still symbolic actions and experiences, such as the simultaneous activity of people reading the same newspaper. Emphasising this imagined element highlights an important aspect of authoritative performances, in that whilst they may be directed at reinforcing collective identity, they do not necessarily require the physical presence of that collective to be effective. This implies that the collective outcomes may depend as much on our ability to make those imaginative links, by overlooking inauthentic elements, as they do on the nature or visibility of the performance. This also suggests that assessments of urban authenticity as new beginnings or origins are dependent on which particular collective that imagined link connects one to.

Despite the power of this subjective and imaginative process, authenticating acts and authoritative performances are not interchangeable according to Arnould and Price (2000). That is, authenticating acts cannot successfully reinforce a community connection, nor can authoritative performances establish an individual's identity as separate from the collective. However, they can be complimentary; working in individual and cumulative ways to create a sense of identity (Arnould and Price 2000). Thus in different ways, each process contributes to our narratives of identity that are both individual, and situated within a social space.

This chapter proposes that this accumulative potential is particularly relevant in an urban environment. This is because our identifications with and attachments to place are constructed over time, and through repeated interactions and experiences, that draw on a myriad of symbolic and cultural cues associated with that place. Of particular interest here is how this cumulative experiencing of authenticity may play out when it is being sought through the consumption of, and within, a specific neighbourhood. Because a neighbourhood is a space where individual and collective

authentication and the experiences that construct it may be inextricably intertwined within the extraordinary and the ordinary consumption activities that an individual engages in. The focus of this chapter then is to explore how authenticating acts and authoritative performances may work individually and cumulatively when experienced through servicescapes that represent a neighbourhood's new beginnings and origins. It will also consider the ways this may shape experiences of neighbourhood-based community and assessments of urban authenticity.

A SELF-NARRATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To examine this process of individual and collective authentication through the urban environment, this chapter draws on an autoethnography conducted in a gentrifying suburb of Melbourne, Australia. This research followed the author's attempts to use its servicescapes to construct an experience of identification with that neighbourhood's community. This project applied theories of postmodern consumer tribes (e.g., Cova, 1997; Cova et al., 2007; Maffesoli, 1996), proposing that fleeting relations and shared value that are experienced within servicescapes may work to construct an experience of community that is both ephemeral, and yet anchored within a shared identification with place.

The first phase of this research sought to explore this process from the perspective of the individual. It focused on the subjectivity inherent in the experiences of shared value and identity definition in servicescapes and the ways these may become linked as an experience of community. Investigating this subjectivity was deemed important to understand how individuals, businesses, and governing organisations may actively work to facilitate such connections. This is because subjective interpretation is inherent within both the symbolic and imagined aspects of community, and in the consumption experiences that are proposed here as a way of experiencing that shared identity. It is for this reason that an autoethnographic approach was adopted, recording the author's consumption experiences within the servicescapes of my new neighbourhood for one year.

As a research methodology, autoethnography allows the experience of the individual to be used reflexively to illuminate certain aspects of broader social phenomena (L. Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis and Bochner, 2000). In this research it is applied as a means of connecting the personal experience of attempting to identify

with a place-based community through consumption experiences, with broader cultural and theoretical ideas of what community represents. However because autoethnography is also embedded within the process of constructing a narrative of self-identity (Ellis, 2004; Ellis and Bochner, 2000), this project presents a unique opportunity to examine how authenticity may be experienced by an individual within the urban environment and in relation to place-based community. This is because I was not only interested in establishing an identity as part of a neighbourhood-based community for research purposes, but as a new resident to Melbourne I also sought to establish a sense of my identity, utilising the tools of the new physical and social space in which I found myself. That is, I was seeking to authenticate my sense of self, as well as experience that self in relation to the collective identity of my neighbourhood.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took the form of extensive memo writing, as recommended by Ellis (2004), with over 150 pages of field notes recorded on just over 100 different servicescape-based consumption experiences, from September 2008 to September 2009. These memos focused on recording which servicescapes I frequented, and my actions within those locations. They also recorded the nature and general content of the conversations I had with staff and customers, and the way those interactions made me feel and act. A third focus of these memos was the assumptions and associations I made between servicescapes and people, both as individuals and collectively. That is, whilst the majority of my data records my actions within servicescapes, the places I did not go and the things I thought about but did not do were also an important component. Each memo can thus be thought of as an episode in the ongoing narrative of me trying to determine the neighbourhood's identity, and my relation to it.

The data analysis has focused on the interplay between these servicescape-based interactions, my emotional responses, the experienced value, and the identity attributions recorded within my research notes. Statements about identity were considered from the perspective of whether I was making statements about my own identity or the identity of others (both people and places), and the means through which that identity was expressed. These identity statements were then categorised utilising Richins (1997) descriptors of emotions experienced through consumption and

Holbrook's (1999) consumer value typology. This allowed for the investigation of emotional responses in combination with value experiences, and the consideration of how they may combine during individual and collective consumption experiences. Whilst it may be expected that authentication would primarily result through value experiences that have positive emotional impacts, this analysis highlighted the relation between negative value experiences and emotional responses, and the tendency to overlook inauthenticity to achieve the desired identity benefits, as discussed within the literature review.

Statements that specifically related to people were also coded according to the type of interaction they most represented. To do so, Lofland's (1998) differentiation of the types of secondary relations that may occur in public space was applied. She defines these as fleeting, routinised, quasi-primary and intimate-secondary, with shifts in the relational types occurring as information is exchanged between parties and emotional impact increases. In particular, quasi-primary relations describe the brief moments of shared experience of the tribal aesthetic, whereas intimate-secondary are the relations of acquaintances. It would be expected then that both relational types would feature within authentication processes, with the shift from quasi-primary to intimate-secondary reflecting a shift from collective to individual value experiences as relations become more personal. This manner of categorisation allowed me to structure the data in ways so as to track these relational changes and then relate them to value experiences and emotional responses.

What this analysis has most clearly indicated is the extent to which personal and collective identification is intertwined, particularly when both are being acted out within a broader narrative of attempting to establish a place-based identity. It also highlighted the extent to which the desired outcomes guiding such interactions may only become apparent upon reflection, or when consumption experiences work as epiphanic moments that highlight hidden motives in past activities. In particular the contrast between the emotions experienced across the two locations focused on here illustrated the extent to which experiences of inauthenticity inform future authentication practices. As these locations also represented the neighbourhood's new beginnings and origins, this interplay between authentic and inauthentic experiences had implications for my broader assessments of the authenticity of my neighbourhood. The particular features of these two locations are described in the following section.

The Research Sites

This chapter focuses on my experiences within two of the neighbourhood's servicescapes, a bar, and the local shopping centre. These sites were chosen because they are the key locations of my lifestyle and everyday consumption activities; they are also sites that I have identified to others as important to my developing place-based identity, as the follow excerpt indicates.

> [Acquaintance] asked me if I'd been hanging out at [the Plaza] doing fieldwork, if I still liked it. Which I said I did, 'cause all the old folk hang out there, but really I'd been hanging out at [the Bar] doing fieldwork, meeting all the [neighbourhood] weird people'. He kind of laughed, in a way that implied he had a certain opinion of [the Bar], although I'm not sure what it is. He had mentioned the place to me before, I guess it could be seen as yuppie or exclusive in one way. And I had identified myself with it. (Research notes, 8th February, 2009)

The Bar exemplifies Zukin's category of new beginnings, it also operates as a third place or anchoring place (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999; Oldenburg, 1999). Here I interact with a neighbourhood-based network of my socio-cultural peers whilst also expressing and reinforcing personal identity preferences. The Plaza is the local shopping centre, built in 1981 on an abandoned industrial site. This relatively ordinary space has been co-opted in ways that illustrate the neighbourhood's origins, both as an ethnic, and lower socio-economic area. The area's elderly residents in particular use its public spaces in the manner of a real plaza, or traditional main street. In this way it also operates as a place of exposure (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999) by displaying the diversity and social practices of a broader cross-section of the neighbourhood's residents. In this respect the Plaza represents what Zukin describes as a social understanding of origins, in that it provides a place in which the neighbourhood's historical roots are on display.

Both places have contributed to my understanding of the neighbourhood's identity, and shape the way that I relate to any communities that I associate with it. These sites thus play key roles in my perception and evaluation of the authenticity of the urban experience that my neighbourhood offers. The following sections provide a brief description of these servicescapes and then discuss my authenticating experiences within them. Each description firstly focuses on the relationship I developed with the servicescape, and then considers the ways this worked as a process

of authentication. The final section considers how these separate places of authentication worked together to inform a broader identification with place and with neighbourhood-based community.

EXPERIENCING NEW BEGINNINGS IN THE BAR

The Bar opened in late 2007, in what was previously a shoe shop. They kept the name, and a photograph of the previous proprietor above the bar; however beyond those limited nods to history, this small wine bar exemplifies the gentrifying new beginnings of the area. Whilst the Bar can be busy, it is rarely overwhelmingly so. Indeed it was initially described to me as a good venue to go with friends if you wanted to talk, rather than as a location in which to interact with strangers. The Bar is situated on the Main Street of the neighbourhood, surrounded by cafes and restaurants, independent clothing stores, bookshops and other bars. This street is the neighbourhood's entertainment and lifestyle precinct, and its new beginnings writ large.

The Bar as a Third Place

The Bar differentiates itself from the six other bars in the Main Street through music selection, service approach, product offering and servicescape layout, so as to target a specific niche of the larger resident demographic that could be described as new urban middle class. This value offering is built on a service gap identified by the owners based on their personal lifestyle preferences, which is a practice Zukin identifies as common with sites of new beginnings. The three owners maintain an obvious presence, with a least one of them working most nights. Their presence has a significant influence on the atmosphere and customer service approach of the bar. This was aptly summarised in the query of an acquaintance; "is that the bar where the bartenders are more interested in putting on records and dancing than they are in serving customers?" Ah, yes.

Whilst acknowledging the truth in that person's assessment, my defence of the bar owners and staff, "the service is better when they know you", illustrates my relationship with this servicescape; it has become my third place (Oldenburg, 1999). These are quasi-public spaces that allow for an experience of communal gathering that is inclusive and sociable, yet are not bound by the commitments of primary relations

(Oldenburg 1999).These sites are familiar in popular culture as the corner shop or local pub where 'everybody knows your name', and as such third places are often presented as open, friendly places in which individuals can freely interact and connect. However this assumption of openness simplifies the constraints that can surround secondary relations in public places, including social norms, and the physical elements of servicescape layout. Lofland (1998) in particular argues that such locations more often operate as parochial realms, where meaningful interaction is limited to those who are accepted as regulars or within specific social networks. In this more closed form, third places are similar to what Aubert-Gamet and Cova (1999) call anchoring places; servicescapes in which communities come together to reinforce their relationships and identity through ritualised and symbolic practices.

These physical and social constraints are evident within the Bar. It operates as an anchoring place for a neighbourhood-based social network, which can co-opt certain sections of the servicescape in parochial ways. This potentially exclusionary practice is assisted by a layout that segments the venue, and can limit interaction between customers to brief encounters at the bar, or in the passage way. Like many bars, this means that the small seating area at the bar is the most conducive to secondary relations, and it was from this position that much of my interacting took place. One consequence of this seating arrangement is that much of my attention was directed towards the Bar's owners and staff. More generally this layout also limits the potential of the servicescape to operate as a site of collective identification. This is because sitting at the bar encourages a one to one focus, and separates those at the bar from the interaction occurring in the booths and passage way behind them. This seating arrangement had implications for the connections I was able to develop, as will be discussed in the following section.

Constructing a Personal New Beginning in a Third Place

My third place relationship with the Bar has developed over time. I am what Katovich and Reese (1987) describe as an irregular regular; my patronage is infrequent, but I still have a regular's expectation of a certain level of interaction and recognition. This customer identity has developed as an initial identification with the excellence of product and the aesthetics of the servicescape design has grown over time into a deeper attachment to people and place. This shift has resulted from an accumulation of

shared experiences and the value they represent. This includes the playful appreciation of music, and involvement in its selection; the status, esteem, and play experienced through personal greetings, meetings with other regulars and shared conversations over the bar. That is, value experiences based on materiality were superseded by those with relational value, as the routinised and quasi-primary relations between myself and the Bar's owners, staff, and other regular customers evolved into intimate-secondary relations. The beginning of this shift is evident in the following excerpt:

> Much happier with [the Bar] lately, I was there on Thursday, and again tonight, and staff … they've been attentive, on Thu night definitely. Well I felt like they could see my pain and they kept on checking on the volume of wine in my glass. And he [owner 1] said goodbye to me when I left, and he said goodbye to me again tonight, which is just is one of those things I've been watching out for. And this evening I went for a glass and stayed for three because actually I was quite liking it. I was just reading the paper and randomly looking about and talking a little bit to the dude who was sitting next to me and to the bar staff. And I guess that was the first time I've chatted with them generally. And [owner 1] gave me some olives, as a freebie, which I guess is perhaps the first sign of some level of recognition of being some - local, regular…So I'll need to definitely go to [the Bar] a lot more now. It's becoming more what I thought it should be. (Research notes, 6th December, 2008)

However, the development of my relationship with the Bar and the people associated with has not been as easy Oldenburg's recommendation that "one simply keeps reappearing and tries not to be obnoxious" (1999, p. 35) would suggest. My expectations of recognition and the emotional value I came to attach to this servicescape, did not always match my experiences within it. For example, it took another four visits spread over seven weeks before I managed to learn Owner 1's name, after eventually asking another customer. It then took another two visits over four weeks before I was able to tell them mine. Whilst the time frame is not surprising given the infrequency of my patronage, the extent of my emotional investment in this simple act of introduction was. Indeed my research notes over this period suggest that discontent, embarrassment, and feelings of being ignored or out of place, are as much a feature of my reflections of my interactions in that place as are joy, excitement, and a feeling of connection, as the following excerpt suggests.

> Thinking about tonight and [owner 2] and [staff member] and introductions and realising I feel a bit let down/disappointed about the lack of something from them. But I realise also that is because I am wanting something more from them than the

> superficial I keep on going on about. I want recognition, as a person worth knowing. And that is perhaps were the thing of doing it by yourself falls down. I have an emotional investment in it. (Research notes, 2nd February 2009)

The intensity of this emotional response can be linked to confusion between authenticating and authoritative aims. In fact, whilst I originally viewed the Bar as a means of establishing connections to a neighbourhood-based collective, my research notes illustrate that much of my energy was directed to establishing more personal connections to the owners and staff. These aims are not mutually exclusive; previous research has highlighted that owners and staff play important roles as gatekeepers and bridging ties to the social networks that operate within their servicescapes (e.g., Rosenbaum, 2007; Spradley and Mann, 1975). However my desire for personal authentication and the personal emotional conflict it caused would seem to be somewhat at odds with the mythology of the third place as a place of easy sociality. This is because whilst my experiences in the Bar were clearly social, they were rarely collective. They instead hinged on one to one interactions that were directed at affirming my membership of a cultural group with whom such consumption practices and locations are associated. That is, I was using my third place identification with the Bar as a means of authenticating my personal new beginning.

It is worth noting that only two weeks later a brief stop for a glass of wine turned into a long revelatory evening in the company of the two owners referenced in these quotes. That is, my uncertainty was soon relieved by an experience that reinforced my status as a 'person worth knowing'. However this subsequent experience of authentication did not significantly alter the underlying secondary nature of my relationship with the Bar owners, and had little bearing on my relations with other regular customers. Nor did it prevent future moments of self-doubt. Indeed my research notes, and experiences, continue to reinforce the superficial nature of this authenticating act and its need for ongoing reinforcement. This reinforcement is necessary to overcome the conflict between my desire to identify the Bar as a site of collective identification, and the personal focus of my authenticating practices

(In)Authenticities and New Beginnings

The Bar then not only exemplifies the new beginnings of the neighbourhood, but also my personal new beginning. I used the symbolic value embedded within the Bar, its association with the neighbourhood's new beginnings, and with a specific cultural group, as tools within that authentication process. Essentially I was drawing on the cultural capital invested in the types of consumption practices and spaces the urban middle class use to authenticate claims of new beginnings to establish my membership of that cultural group. As part of this process I also sought to establish intimate-secondary relations with the Bar's owners and staff, in an attempt to embed myself within a social network, and as means of performing that broader collective identification. Thus whilst this bar now operates as my third place, a location in which I have constructed, and reinforce the intimate-secondary relations that are anchored there, it only became so once I was able to establish for myself an authentic sense of who I was within that place. My attachment to and identification with the Bar, and the people with whom I interact when within it, primarily serves to reinforce my belief in my neighbourhood as a place in which I can express that authentic self.

To do so however, I must overlook a number of inauthentic aspects of my construction of the Bar as a third place. This includes the contradiction between the positive mythology of the third place, and the many negative aspects of my relational practices. In particular, my emotional need for personal recognition through intimate-secondary relations undermined the possibility that this site may work to connect me to a broader neighbourhood-based collective. Instead as I authenticate my personal new beginning, by becoming friends with the Bar owners, I also reinforce the collective use of this cultural capital of new beginnings as a means of representing a certain model urban authenticity. In this respect, my experiences of authentication within the Bar would appear to support Zukin's conceptualisation of new beginnings, suggesting that they are primarily about individual authentication through the cultural capital of the new urban middle classes. However the moments of disruption that my negative experiences represent also highlight the limitations of this authentication within a neighbourhood context. This is because when I am questioning my own identifications, I am also recognising that these new beginnings offer only a partial expression of both the identity of my neighbourhood, and of my identification with it. This is partial expression is made more apparent when my experiences in the Bar are contrast with those in the Plaza, which is described in the following section.

EXPERIENCING ORIGINS IN THE PLAZA

The second site of interest here is the local shopping centre, the Plaza, built in 1981 on an old industrial site. This shopping centre primarily services neighbourhood residents for everyday shopping purposes. It is not a destination mall. It contains two supermarkets, a discount department store, and full range of other food and retail stores including bakeries, chemists, a newsagent, butcher, health food store, travel agent, pet shop, takeaway food outlets, electronics store, plus some low cost clothing and homewares stores, and generic '$2' junk shops. Some of these stores are major retail brands. Many are non-descript small businesses, that are not identifiably independent or locally owned. They are ordinary shops.

The Plaza is well patronised; on Saturdays, or when it is raining, cold, or hot, the centre is bustling, often in stark contrast to the quiet Main Street just beyond it. For this pulling power the Plaza is often disparaged; by the new beginnings Main Street traders, or individuals who appear to subscribe to an ethic of supporting small business and primarily associate the Plaza with the supermarkets that anchor it. As is common with shopping centres, it does appear to have impacted on the retail offerings of the Main Street, concentrating everyday shopping amenities within its walls, and essentially creating a separation between the ordinary and lifestyle shopping areas of the neighbourhood.

The Plaza as an Exposure Place

In line with this separation, the Plaza is a site in which I mainly engage in mundane or everyday shopping activities, such as buying groceries. I also use it as a short cut on my way to the Main Street; it thus forms a part of my neighbourhood 'round'. For me, the value offered by the Plaza is mostly one of efficiency. It offers convenient access to a broad range of essential products and services that I use to supplement my ethical preferences of supporting small business. It also offers a climate controlled route from my house to the lifestyle areas of the suburb and beyond.

However, as an ordinary shopping space, the Plaza is also the most diverse servicescape within the neighbourhood, offering a range of products and services that appeal to, or at least would be required by, most residents within the area. It is

effectively a place in which everyone ends up at some stage, and thus presents opportunities for what might be called ordinary authoritative performances, through quasi-primary encounters with other residents. My growing awareness of this potential is evident within my research notes. I moved from references to the Plaza as a 'non-place' (Auge, 1995), with no real identity-defining value for me, to the recognition of its social role in the lives of other residents, and an increased expectation that it may offer me similar experiences. This shifting perception and its impact with regard to my sense of neighbourhood-based identity is illustrated in the following research note excerpt.

> I don't really see [the Plaza] as a place of sociality – for me. I see lots of other people engaging in interaction there, particularly the old Greek men, but also people running into each other, and I have even seen [neighbour] and [hairdresser] there once. But in reality I don't expect to see people or have the potential for recognition experiences there, despite the fact it is the most certain place where people will be eventually and also most likely to mark a person as being from the local area. I just don't expect it from a shopping mall – with relation to my demographic.
>
> But today I saw both [resident familiar from the Bar] and the guy from [cafe staff member]. Neither of them recognised me. … Neither of those experiences where particularly exciting, and didn't do anything for the 'being recognised thing' but did make me think about, have I been here long enough that I'm starting to run into people in the supermarket? Maybe I am becoming local after all? (Research notes, 4th March, 2009)

Unlike the Bar however, the hope of intimate-secondary interaction is not the key driver of my authentication practices in the Plaza. Instead it is primarily a place in which I observe and appreciate the consumption practices and associated sociality of other neighbourhood residents, in particular an older generation of men and women who use the shopping centre's public spaces as their third place. As with my consumption experiences within the Bar, this appreciation draws on a range of experienced value to which meaning is attributed in a comparative and accumulative process. This appreciation takes on spiritual qualities; it is intrinsic, reactive, and other-oriented, and overrides my more generalised dislike for shopping centres as a whole. As Zukin suggests, I also use my appreciation of the Plaza to affirm my moral or ethical superiority over those who disparage its ordinariness. Significantly though these claims are directed at those within my cultural group whom I see as being unable to look beyond the mundane nature of the shops and mass market implications of the

supermarket, to appreciate the ways that Plaza's spaces appeal to a broad range of neighbourhood residents. This ethical stance is reinforced through occasional playful quasi-primary interactions with some of the Plaza regulars, which further serves to reinforce my impression of its open and inclusive sociality.

Most significantly however, I use my appreciation of the Plaza as a social space to affirm my identification with the broader neighbourhood community. That is, my exposure to the anchoring practices of a different cultural group works in the manner of the simultaneous actions of an imagined community. In seeing others act out what I strive so hard to achieve in the Bar; I recognise the possibility of a shared link. Thus my experiences in the Plaza are in some ways epiphanic, highlighting the extent to which my experiences in the Bar are primarily aimed at self-authentication, whilst suggesting a different pathway to collective identification.

Attachment and Authentication at the Plaza

The combination of efficiency, play, my spiritual and ethical response to the Plaza's social value for others, and the recognition of the shared authentication practices that are bound up in that sociality, has worked to create a sense of attachment to my local shopping centre. This is clearly indicated in the research note excerpt below.

> [The Plaza] is clearly a contributor to the place-identity of [suburb] – in as much because some people dislike it and thus react against it ... But it also contributes to my identity within this place. My appreciation for what [the Plaza] offers some people is an example of that, given I would have previously put myself in the anti-shopping centre box. I kind of like [the Plaza], and seeing all the old guys use it the way they do makes me smile. I shop there and am not ashamed by it. Certainly I maintain the same usage patterns regarding the supermarket – but I can separate what [the Plaza] is as a place from what Coles is. I think if I did move down the hill, so that [the Plaza] was no longer on my path to other places, that I would miss it a little bit. Miss seeing its sociality anyway. (Research notes, 26th March, 2009)

This sense of attachment to the Plaza, and in particular to its role as an exposure place, illustrates the ways that authenticating acts and authoritative performances can work in complimentary and cumulative ways. My assessments of its value have moved from being of no identity-defining value, to a hope of the possibility of meaningful interaction, to authenticating statements, to concern at the potential loss of it as a place in which to regularly witness and engage in authoritative

performances. Furthermore, it was the realisation of the potential for interaction with members of my cultural group, reinforced through an authenticating appreciation of the sociality of others, which illustrated the potential of broader authenticating performances. That is, ones that linked me to neighbourhood residents outside the limited cultural group with whom I interact in the Bar and other places of new beginnings. Significantly this recognition of a shared identification with a broader demographic worked to further highlight the inauthenticities in the identity of new beginnings I authenticate within the Bar. That is, I have used my identification with a Plaza-based collective as a way to differentiate myself from assumed cultural practices of a more restricted socio-cultural based collective. In my appreciation of the Plaza I individuate myself from those I sought to identify with when in the Bar, as a means of remedying some of the insecurities I experience in that location.

Distancing and Exposure in a site of Origins

The Plaza's role as a space of exposure is fundamental to this comparative process. As an exposure site it displays the neighbourhood's roots through the ordinary shopping practices of a broad range of residents. In this way the Plaza works as a levelling place, reducing cultural and demographic differences to one of shared geography and shopping practices. Whilst this effectively reduces the strength of the potential link between individuals, because rituals and traditions need to be broadly recognisable, it increases its potential breadth, ensuring these aspects of the neighbourhood's history continue to be performed. In this case, the relational practices of the older residents who are co-opting the Plaza's spaces highlights the extent to which my new beginning, expressing authenticity through social interaction in third places, is merely the continuation of the practices of original residents. Thus my collective authentication within the Plaza draws on my individual authentication within the Bar, to reinforce the authenticity of my neighbourhood, as a place in which traditions can be continued, across different servicescapes, and demographics.

However, whilst my appreciation of the social opportunities the Plaza offers diverse residents may have value to me in confirming a connection to the area's broader community, it also involves an element of distancing against which Zukin warns in her discussion of the aestheticisation of authenticity as origins. The appreciative stance I adopt toward the sociality of others is taken from the safety of

my ordinary shopping practices, which offer me a position from which to observe, but only superficially engage with others. This distancing though is in effect a requirement of the function of an exposure place, and I suggest that it is this element of distancing that allows me to compare my experiences of authenticity and consider their cumulative impact. This is because this distancing reduces the emotional impact of my relational activities in the Plaza, and thus leaves me more open to experiencing the collective identification of a neighbourhood-based community.

What is significant with regard to Zukin's concerns however is that this emotional distancing does not prevent the development of attachment. Indeed I would suggest it played a key role in facilitating it. This may in part be a response to the social ways in which origins are expressed in this location, that is, the Plaza's is more than a physical expression of the neighbourhood's history. However, this attachment goes beyond an appreciation of social practices, it is embedded within the Plaza's physical spaces. It shapes my usage patterns and my adoption of it as site of authentication. Furthermore, despite the distancing, and the claims of recognising authenticity that can accompany it, my attachment to this ordinary shopping space works as a representation of my attachment to my neighbourhood. Indeed it is mostly through this ordinary space that my attachment to and identification with my neighbourhood is expressed.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE AUTHENTICATION THROUGH NEW BEGINNINGS AND ORIGINS

At the heart of the research that inspired this chapter is a concern regarding the interplay between consumption practices and neighbourhood-based community. This is also a key concern in Zukin's recent work on authenticity within the urban environment. In effect we are both interested in the ways that the consumption spaces of the urban environment can offer individuals a means through which to effectively express their desire for individuality and for collective identification. This chapter considered these concerns through the rubric of authenticating acts and authoritative performances as defined by Arnould and Price, by drawing on autoethnographic data of my experiences within two neighbourhood servicescapes; the Bar and the Plaza.

The Bar, is a place of new beginnings for both the neighbourhood and myself. Whilst it operates as a third place for me, and an anchoring place for others, it is

primarily a place in which I authenticate my personal new beginnings by associating them with the consumption preferences and social practices of a specific cultural group. The Plaza meanwhile has been coopted by older residents as a social space that displays the neighbourhood's diversity and origins. It works as an anchoring place for this cultural group, however for me it takes on the role of a place of exposure. Here I can observe, and engage with that community's authoritative performances from the safety of my ordinary shopping behaviours. The Plaza also works as a place where some of the insecurity suggested in my struggles for recognition within the Bar, are remedied. I use my appreciation of its value as an anchoring place for others, as a means to reassert my moral credibility to myself, with reference to what I see as the less appreciative attitudes of my peers. That is, my desire for individual authentication in one highlights the possibility for collective authentication in the other.

This interplay of identity definition across these two servicescapes highlights the cumulative nature of authentication practices and the complicated ways they can work together in the construction of a place-based identity. I only began to see the identity defining value of the Plaza, when I recognized the value it offered others. Furthermore, my attachment to the Plaza that developed out of this recognition of value worked to highlight the narrowness of my authentications in the Bar. In both locations I must overlook inauthenticities so as to achieve the individual or collective authentication I desire, such as my failed attempts at personal recognition in the Bar, and the aesthetic distancing that prevents my complete collective engagement in the Plaza. However when considered cumulatively these locations also offer opportunities to remedy these inauthenticities through their complementary nature; the Bar offers opportunities to establish my identity with reference to a cultural group, and the Plaza allows me to experience a less emotionally taxing collective authentication. Importantly these separate individual and collective experiences also work to authenticate a broader identification with my neighbourhood that is reinforced through the link of our shared social practices, whether lived out in sites of new beginnings or origins.

The interplay between my authenticating practices in these two locations and the relational activities also speaks to aspects of the postmodern approach to place-based community that underlies this research. If sites of new beginnings work primarily to reinforce individual identity by operating as third places, and sites of origins work as exposure places to demonstrate broader connections to a collective,

then it could be suggested that the latter are more significant with regard to constructing a place-based postmodern community. However the rituals being performed in the Plaza take on much of their collective meaning when they are contrast to the more individual identification practices of the Bar. That is, the Plaza's exposure role only became apparent in contrast to my attempts to anchor within the Bar. This reinforces the importance of both anchoring and exposure sites within neighbourhoods, and the opportunities for individual and collective authentication that they offer. It also suggests the importance of sites of origins taking on that exposure role, because they are by their nature more inclusive than the anchoring sites of new beginnings.

In effect this conclusion returns to Zukin's concerns regarding urban authenticity, suggesting that the loss of a social understanding of origins, and spaces in which this can be experienced, can limit our understanding of urban authenticity overall. However it also illustrates how individual authentication within sites of new beginnings provides an important contrast against which this experience of origins can be defined. Whilst this reconfirms that urban identities cannot be reduced to individual experiences in servicescapes, my experience also suggests that individual authentication practices will also not tolerate such narrow urban identifications. Whilst authenticating acts that are anchored in sites of new beginnings and draw on the cultural capital of the new urban middle class are unlikely to lead to social change, I would also argue that this authenticating potential relies on comparative experiences, such as offered by sites of origins. This chapter also suggests that the exposure places that can provide a space for such experiences do not necessarily need to be themselves a representation of those origins. Instead they may be ordinary shopping spaces that allow for traditions and rituals to be performed in tandem with everyday practices. This final point may be significant in gentrifying neighbourhoods, because despite their tendency toward lifestyle consumption spaces, they generally retain their more ordinary offerings, such as supermarkets and local shopping centers. Thus whilst Zukin proposes that the pervasive nature of experienced-based consumer culture means that only state intervention can address this inevitability, I am more hopeful for the potential of individuals to affect change through their consumption practices.

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